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Salt Verification Fears Begin to Ease in Senate

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Washington—Testimony in the third week of Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty hearings in the Senate indicates growing belief that adequate verification is possible. Emphasis now is shifting to demands that defense spending be increased as a condition for support of the treaty.

Opposition emerged during hearings before the Senate Armed Services Committee, where Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) said his support for the treaty depends upon as yet undetected vigorous support for defense spending by the Carter Administration. Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Gen. David C. Jones said inflation has reduced the Fiscal 1979 and proposed Fiscal 1980 Defense budget increases to well below the 3% promised by President Jimmy Carter to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The next day, former NATO commander Gen. Alexander M. Haig, Jr., told the Armed Services Committee he agreed with Sen. Nunn. He urged that ratification of SALT 2 "be held in abeyance" until serious flaws are corrected.

"Like Sen. Nunn, I am not satisfied that the necessary commitments have been made, not only with respect to our strategic needs," Gen. Haig said. "But I am also concerned that the Administration's budgets for the past two years and the President's defense budget projections through Fiscal 1984 are inadequate to meet our conventional needs, to say nothing of our already proffered commitments to NATO."

Asked by Sen. Howard W. Cannon (D-Nev.) for specific flaws, Gen. Haig cited the hard target kill imbalance established in the treaty, the U.S. dependence on air-breathing strategic capability which means a "12-hr. time sequence" before reaching Soviet targets, and the general lack of consensus on U.S. policy which not only hampered SALT negotiations but also has been a problem for 15 years. Haig said he sees within the Carter Administration "flirtations toward a mutual assured destruction policy and a minimum deterrent."

Sen. Nunn called for a 4-5% real increase in the defense budget as his price for support of SALT 2, but said he doubted the Carter Administration will take corrective action on inflation to make that possible.

Senate committees of complaints by either side to the Standing Consultative Commission, the U.S.-Soviet group established under SALT 1 to deal with questions of compliance. It meets twice a year.

Other clarifications may come from Sen. John W. Warner (R-Va.), who noted during hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the Soviets do not recognize U.S. listening posts in foreign nations as a national technical means of verification.

Outgoing U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union Malcolm Toon, like Sen. Goldwater, has overcome earlier doubts about verification to announce his support for the treaty before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Sen. Glenn now agrees with the Joint Chiefs' testimony (AW&ST July 16, p. 25) that SALT 2 is a "modest but useful" step forward in the SALT process. He has said he will support the treaty if questions of verification can be resolved.

Sen. William S. Cohen (R-Me.) joined in a call by Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) for memos and cable traffic between the negotiators and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which would reveal military advice given on the treaty.

Among other recommendations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff called for lower ceilings on total weapons and multiple warhead launchers, and inclusion of the Soviet Tupolev Tu-22M Backfire bomber in the totals.

Defense Secretary Harold Brown continued to press the argument that U.S. land-based missiles will become vulnerable to a Soviet first-strike during 1982-86 with or without SALT 2, but SALT 2 will make that unstable period more predictable since it establishes limits. Gen. Jones said the U.S. does not fear a period when the Soviets could launch an actual strike "out of the blue," but rather, a period when the Soviet confidence for political adventurism is increased.

Brown said failure to count mothballed Boeing B-52 bombers in the weapons total would have allowed the Soviets to stockpile uncounted bombers. The U.S. would have to destroy several of 37 B-52 hulks now in storage, while the Soviets would destroy 250 missiles and bombers built since 1965.